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ABSTRACT

A positive approach to advancing educational equity across a district is to see educational equity as a school-level problem that requires planned change. The success of such an approach depends on the care taken to define educational equity. The definition must encompass three characteristics: a sense of construct validity, preciseness, and endurance. When working toward "equity," program evaluation becomes change-over-time. Three criteria for evaluating change-over-time are presented: first, access to services; second, participation rates by subsets of a school's pupil populations; and third, analysis of outcomes of services in terms of increased pupil performance. Analysis of outcomes is the most demanding of the three equity standards. If schools are able to produce more equitable educational outcomes, the need for carefully monitoring equality of access or equality of participation in education becomes less necessary. (MD)

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"Equality of Educational Programs Within A School District"

"Three Criteria of Equality - Access, Participation, and Outcomes - Applied"

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When evaluating educational equity in a specific program context, time-series models are most appropriate. And, rather than approaching the effort as a major district goal, a more positive approach is to perceive the attainment of educational equity through planned change at the individual school level. Then, as desired outcomes are reached across the district, no school during the interim has been singled out as "winning/losing" or "succeeding/failing."

The participants in this evaluation process would need to work toward a shared understanding of the meaning of the word "equity." Program evaluation, in this instance, becomes change over time. It is essential to formulate an evaluation design that is clear. The data to be gathered and analyzed should be kept simple. These efforts facilitate monitoring over time.

All students can learn, if educators teach in such a way that students can learn. Wher striving for educational equity, it becomes less necessary to monitor equality of access or equality of use opportunities for all students, if a school is able to produce a high degree of equitable outcomes.

Most educational program evaluations seek to evaluate a level of educational equality within the context of a single school, school district, or school program. Generally, such educational programs have as either their explicit or implicit purpose that of determining whether there is a demonstrable change in the level of educational equality that can be associated with the program being evaluated. Because of the context-specific nature of such educational program evaluations and because of the interest in change -- hopefully for the better -- many of the usual descriptive, comparative evaluation approaches are not appropriate. The major thesis of this paper is that when evaluating educational equity in a specific program context, time-series models are most appropriate.

The more traditional comparative descriptive models for program evaluation tend to yield normative statements about some schools doing a "better job" than others. The problem tends to be that both those who "win" and those who "lose" with such comparisons tend to explain away the results.

Normative studies may produce statements which result in unfair or unfortunate comparisons. This is especially true when the unit of analysis is an individual school within a single district. A school which rates less well in the comparisions will offer many reasons for its poorer outcome. And, schools which are fortunate enough to compare well may accept their favored status reluctantly. Next time, the comparison might place the school on the other end of the normative scale.

A more positive approach to the problem of advancing educational equity across a district is to approach the problem as a school-level problem which requires planned change to produce desired outcomes.

To advance the level of educational equity, a school begins with a school-specific base-line. Program evaluation takes on the characteristic of monitoring change over time.

The success of this approach to planned change depends on the care taken to define educational equity. To be useful in advancing the change-over-time agenda the definition must encompass at least three characteristics. First, the definition of educational equity must reflect a sense of construct validity. This means that when the definition is shared with various stakeholders in the process, there is a consensus. That is, what the school staff offers as their effort at providing educational equity is, by definition, a reasonable reflection of what is meant by educational equity.

Defining, then becomes a complex problem. For example, it is not uncommon to hear educators offer radically differing meanings for terms such as "equal educational opportunity." Does that phrase mean..."treating all students the same," or does it imply, "educating students in a manner befitting their individual needs?" The correctness of one or the other is not to be settled here. The issue to embrace and understand is that when one formally chooses a definition for "equal educational opportunity," then based upon that definition the outcomes will be different, the data to be collected will be different, and correlations among students, especially, minority students will surely be different.

A second characteristic for judging the adequacy of any definition is that it must be precise enough to allow for the collection of data which when analyzed will provide a sense of the level of change that has occurred. Frequently we will obtain high levels of agreement on the construct validity reflected in a given definition, but tension

mounts when we attempt to operationalize the definition in terms of observable, measurable, data which can actually be collected, analyzed, and reported to the various stakeholders. Agreements must be reached. It might appear that more data are required than some stakeholders would judge necessary. Collect extra data if necessary to insure the level of credibility required for all with a vested interest in the equality of outcomes.

A third and final standard to be met in defining educational equity is to develop measures that endure over time. Two errors ought to be avoided. First, evaluators must resist the temptation to develop complex measures which require high-powered computers to produce an analysis. If one gets caught in this trap, the data analysis for the first year may proceed smoothly but the analysis in subsequent years will probably be relegated to a lower priority and may never get done at all. If the analysis procedures are kept simple enough to be managed by the present evaluators, the chances of repeating the same analysis over time are greatly enhanced.

A second problem to be avoided is that which occurs when analyses become so complex that they are neither understood nor trusted by the intended client group. This problem, if not avoided, will reduce the likelihood that the plans to monitor change over time will ever come to pass. The suggestions in both cases are similar: keep the data simple; and keep the analysis clear and precise. To fail to do one or both surely reduces the probability that the change-over-time designs will serve as an appropriate evaluation design.

Three Criteria of Equality

Assume that the program evaluation has taken the form of the change-over-time design. What suggestions are useful to the on-site educational evaluator. If one accepts the premise that schools tend to be highly differentiated organizations, then it follows that the evaluation of educational equity in those schools ought to be differentiated as well. The remainder of this paper will disucss and illustrate three levels of educational equality. Each level may be considered as appropriate for some specific educational situations. Combined together they may be utilized to portray accurately the extent of educational equity in a given school or school district.

The first of the three suggested educational equity criteria is that of access. Whether through political or other means, many school services are inaccessible to some students. To illustrate with a contemporary example, access to computers and computing instruction is limited for many students. The levels of access to new technologies, such as computers commonly vary from building to building within a given school system. How are these disparities explained? School people might reason that one school has different priorities from another. Whatever the reason offered, the fact remains that some students - usually those most underserved by the schools -- have been denied access to some valued service. When access has been denied or severly curtailed the measure of improvement to change-over-time that may have the greatest validity would be that measure which would reveal that access has been equalized across all school sites.

In the context of this discussion evidence of increased access to available computers by all students would be one of improvement. Further evidence would be an increase in the numbers of computers that youngsters have available to them in their school setting. The access standard stops short of addressing the question of utilization.

The second criteria or standard for evaluating educational equity is that of participation rates in the school's programs by various subsets of the pupil population. Generally elementary school students tend to participate in most aspects of their school's program. However, when it comes to the secondary levels of schooling where programs can be highly differentiated, it becomes less possible, if desirable, for students to participate in all aspects of the school's programs. In this context evaluating the participation rates for students from various subsets of the pupil population represents a reasonable criteria for judging improved educational equity.

For example, a common source of significant educational differentiation in the high school has to do with participation in ninth grade algebra. Algebra, as a course exists, one assumes, and is therefore accessible to all students. However, an examination of the enrollment patterns in ninth grade algebra will show that the participation rates are not equitably distributed across all subsets of that school's pupil population. It is not unusual for minorities and women to be significantly underrepresented in classes such as ninth grade algebra.

In this context, monitoring changes in the participation rates might represent both a reasonable and appropriate criteria for illustrating change over time in the level of educational equity deemed present in a school.

The previous example implies that enrollment in the course itself indicates evidence of participation. For certain areas of program evaluation, such criteria may prove sufficient. If as time passes a higher standard for indicating participation becomes appropriate, we would follow the students' progress in the classroom setting by a close observation of the level and nature of their participation.

We know from related teacher effectiveness research that some teachers differentiate among some students in terms of their active participation in lessons. How teachers distribute their question-asking, and turn-taking among students are but two variables known to be under the direct control of teachers, and known to have a direct relation to the student's level of participation in the class.

Monitoring the teaching-learning environment closely enough to collect data on equity using participation rates as a measure is logistically complex but often necessary if we are determined to further educational equity across the board.

Suppose we believe our analysis permits us to monitor change over time in levels of access and participation for minority students. What remains to be done?

The third criteria for assessing and evaluating the equitable delivery of school services and monitoring their changes over time is to analyze the <u>outcomes</u> of those services primarily in terms of increased pupil performance.

Concerns for equal access to school programs and services and for equal participation in courses and programs, are essential means to the desired end - the only one that really counts - equal outcomes for all students.

The outcomes criteria or standard is the most demanding of the three equity standards. It says that equalizing opportunities (access) and processes (participation) are necessary but not, in themselves, sufficient. If equal outcomes are not the visible end product of equal access and participation, the equity standards have not yet been attained.

Here are the implications of an equal outcomes standard. At the very least, it must be evidenced that all kids can learn and ought to be expected to do so. Then, staff and students must clearly understand that all students are to be held to the same common standards. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, equal outcomes may, in fact, require unequal means.

We cannot be content, in all cases, with having improved on the access and participation standards where significant and obvious "gaps" in measured outcomes still persist. The standard of equal outcomes provides new opportunities and challenges for educators who are serious about advancing educational equity.

It is more than a challenge to plan and manage different educational delivery systems for minority versus non-minority students using common outcome standards. The opportunity to use research findings such as time-on-task to increase the time devoted to essential skills for socio-economically disadvantaged minorities can work to their benefit. We must hold them and their teachers to the same outcome standards that are met by all other students.

The lower level standards of access and participation are less desirable alternative standards. To retreat to them indicates an unwillingness to actively believe that all kids can learn and that we will teach in such a way that they will learn.

Summary

Any positive change or improvement provides a thrust for further change and even greater improvement. Increasing the level of educational equity present in a school, school district, or in its programs, is an exemplary indication of change or improvement. To demonstrate that change is occurring, the criteria and evidence used to evaluate educational equity will need to be context-specific and differentiated.

Three criteria for evaluating change-over-time which help determine the equity of school services were presented and discussed. The first criteria examined access to services themselves. The second criteria articulated rates of participation by all subsets of the pupil population throughout the delivery system. The third criteria discussed educational outcomes. The position was taken that each criteria is useful in monitoring progress and change in the equity of the educational delivery system. If one accepts the proposition that all students can learn and ought to be taught, so that they do learn, it is then feasible to focus on a higher level of educational equity. If schools are able to produce more equitable educational outcomes, the need for carefully monitoring equality of access or equality of participation becomes less necessary.